

response has been received from the server 10 after a predetermined (but not necessarily fixed) period of time, then the chain or tree process is followed.

Many variations are possible within the inventive concept. For example, the persistence of offer criteria on the server 10 in the Figure 1 embodiment can be applied to the network computers 45, 46, 47 of the Figure 8 embodiment. That is to say, if a network computer 45, 46, 47 receives an offer and is not at that time running a buyer or seller agent that holds a matching offer, the criteria of the received offer may be stored by the receiving network computer 45, 46, 47 (preferably for a limited period) in case its user creates an agent that generates a matching offer in the near future. The user can then be put in contact with the user that issued the received offer, to see if the item is still for sale or wanted as the case may be.

It is also possible in all embodiments for an offer to be sent, transmitted or broadcast repeatedly to a server 10 or to other network computers 45, 46, 47 at whatever intervals may be deemed appropriate, so that if a matching offer is not found initially, it may be found by repeating the exercise after a matching offer has been created.

In another variant of the invention, a user can interrogate a server 10 or another user terminal 45, 46, 47 to identify live auctions with which the server or user terminal is currently involved. That way, the user can view and/or participate in a live auction without having to submit and match offer criteria.

The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its essential attributes. Accordingly, reference should be made to the appended claims and other conceptual statements herein rather than to the foregoing specific description as indicating the scope of the invention.